

**Department of Anthropology**  
**ANTHRO 2219B-001: Cultures of the Middle East**  
**BRIEF COURSE OUTLINE**  
**Winter 2025**

*Date: July 19, 2024*

**Instructor and course information:**

Instructor: Dr. Randa Farah

Method of delivery: in person

Credit value: 0.5

Antirequisites: the former Acknowledgment Anthropology 2219F/G

Prerequisites: None

**Course Description:**

Did you know that the word “algorithm” comes from *al-Khawarizmi* the name of a Persian-Muslim polymath who lived much of his life in Baghdad in the 9th century? We are indebted to this brilliant scholar for the word and field of Algebra (in Arabic *al-Jabr*) borrowed from the title of his manuscript on elementary Algebra. This is but an example of numerous English words that come from or through the Arabic language attesting to the contribution of Arabs and Muslims to various fields of knowledge, and to the myriads of connections, transactions, and interactions they had with the rest of the world over centuries, including with Europe. Media representations, however, depict the relationship between “East” and “West” as inherently oppositional, hostile, and mutually exclusive. In this course, we challenge some of the racist and stereotypical representations of Arabs and Muslims in Western societies and examine the relationship between the production of knowledge about the Middle East, Arabs, and Muslims, and imperial domination. We learn that the Middle East is a vast and heterogeneous region with diverse histories, as well as changing political and sociocultural formations. We begin with a general overview asking where and what is the Middle East. Secondly, we examine the critical historical transformations that shaped the societies and cultures, mainly: the rise of the Arab-Islamic empire in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, including the Andalusian period (Spain today). We then examine the legacies of European colonialism, with a focus on Algeria, Western Sahara, and Palestine. Third, is *Orientalism*, the title of Edward Said’s book and a paradigm within which much of the knowledge in the “West” about the “East” is reproduced. We will discuss Hollywood films that reinforce Orientalist and racist images of Arabs and Muslims as violent (terrorists) and Muslim women in particular as backward, where veiling is viewed as evidence of their “oppressive culture.” Finally, we will select readings about popular culture. Through lectures, readings, films, documentaries, discussions, and assignments, the course will help students engage critically in academic and current public debates about the Middle East.

*A full course schedule including a week-by-week breakdown of topics and assigned readings will be available on the course’s OWL Brightspace site before the first day of class.*

**Course Materials:**

No textbook.

Required readings will be available through the Course Readings tool on the course site.

**Evaluation:**

Grades will be based on the following:

5 Quizzes (5x5%)	25%
2 Short Papers (2x15)	30%
Group Assignment	15%
Exam (mixed format, in-class mid-November)	30%

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